

PREVIEWING THE FUTURE

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Some Experts Look Ahead To 21st Century

In a flash of geologic time, the 21st century—the third millennium—will be upon us.

Will it bring the good life for Americans? There are men today planning for it.

Will it be unbearably crowded and clogged? The same planners fear it, but have ideas for avoiding it.

There probably will be men from earth on the moon 50 years hence. But will it be easier to make that journey than to commute to work, or to visit a dying relative halfway across the land?

There will be technicians with computers capable of the most ingenious innovations. But will their children have ready access to the ABC's of human knowledge? Will we breathe clean air, drink good water, boast good health?

Or will technology, moon-gear and missile-oriented, leave man, in his everyday existence, lagging far behind?

For a glimpse into that world, the 50-year-old American Institute of Planners called recently for the ideas of respected authorities—not in missile and aerospace, but in housing, transportation, finance and the arts.

The responses produced some intriguing previews of a 21st century America that, for technology and gadgetry, would make Buck Rogers feel like a relic of the horse and buggy age.

But they also raised some problems of enormous potential that must be surmounted, if life in the new century is to be worth living at all.

To the extent that the future is predictable, a fairly believable portrait of the next half century emerges from a blending of the ideas of these scholars and planners.

Their composite view:

By the year 2020 the population of the United States, now 200 million, will be about 350 million. About 80 per cent of the population will be living in vast metropolitan areas.

Four huge "megapolitan" regions will contain 60 per cent of the people on less than 8 per cent of the land. These giant complexes will be in Florida, California, along the lower Great Lakes and the Atlantic seaboard—with the last two possibly blending into one gigantic megapolitan.

One pessimistic view is that unless enormous advances are made, the homes of these millions will be little different from today's. City planner Charles Abrams cautioned: "If present trends are any guide, the United States should have put houses on the moon long before it has given all its families decent communities on its own soil. The disparity between house cost and income will show no sign of abating."

But a rosier view, also put forth by Abrams, envisions automation and nuclear power yielding tremendous benefits to man in his quest for suitable shelter. Picture thousands of self-contained new towns in the countryside; fully equipped, capsule rooms to be bought in department stores; sonic cleaning devices and air filtering systems banishing dirt; computerized, microwave ovens automatically mixing ingredients from preselected recipes.

Or helicopters whirling above, hauling geodesic domes in distant sites, where they will be tacked to the ground complete with utilities; compact sewage systems converting dishwater to



pure drinking water. But achievement of these dreams may require a federal agency to do the long-range planning, buy the land directly, arrange for its use, and turn it over to the private sector.

As planner Abrams foresees it: "As more and more people move into the metropolitan regions, the competition for land will stiffen, the traffic flow slow to a halt, and the general problem of getting around, finding a bit of open space, breathing good air and getting good drinking water will move up as public concerns. We shall have to build as many structures of all kinds as we have built since our earliest immigrants moved from their hillside dugouts."

Transportation expert Max L. Feldman, peering into the next 50 years, looks for the development of "at least one high-speed, long-distance transportation mode," and high-speed systems carrying air travelers from all major airports to connections with local traffic distribution systems.

"At least one east-west and two north-south automatic highways should be guiding and controlling individual passenger vehicles speeding from coast to coast and border to border. Freight should be moving

through at least one completed, continuous freight system that completely separates freight from people."

City traffic threatens to become so clogged as to change drastically some long-accepted values, Feldman said. "For example, extreme freedom, the ability of people to go where they want to, when they want to, in their own vehicles by the route of their own choosing, will eventually have to be limited in order to prevent the complete collapse of urban circulating systems and save the cities themselves."

The result: possibly a general acceptance of more expensive, but also more satisfactory, communications devices, such as visual phones.

For international travel, Feldman looks forward to development of a low-fare sky bus. "The jet set will be outnumbered and overshadowed by a great horde of middle-class people from all nations exploring their world. More people will learn to understand people of other lands."

By the year 2000, as Feldman envisions it, "the larger U. S. cities may have converted completely to electric transportation, and several completely new cities should have been

built incorporating the most recently developed transportation systems and offering maximum convenience."

In those great cities, when the private automobile passes from the scene, public transportation might even be free. Those who hunger for time off from work may take heart from the forecast of political scientist Sebastian de Grazia that the average work week, by the year 2000, will average 31 hours, and perhaps as few as 21. Twenty years later, on-the-job hours may have dwindled to 26, or even 18.

But what will people do with all that free time? The outlook may not be cheery.

As De Grazia sees it: "There is reason to fear, as some do, that free time, forced free time, will bring on the restless tick of boredom, idleness, immorality, and increased personal violence. If the cause is identified as automation and the preference for higher intelligence, nonautomated jobs may increase, but they will carry the stigma of stupidity. Men will prefer not to work rather than to accept them. Those who do accept will increasingly come to be a politically inferior class."

One possible solution: a separation of income from work; perhaps a guaranteed annual

wage to provide "the wherewithal for a life of leisure for all those who think they have the temperament."

To accommodate the new age of leisure, "the city has to be turned into a place for (man) to live in and enjoy, rather than a place for him to escape from to restore his senses." Educator Robert M. Hutchins sees a movement away from the theory of education aimed at meeting the manpower needs of society. "An educational system that aims at manpower rather than manhood will not suffice. As the rate of technological change is accelerated, it will become clear that, almost by necessity, training for a job will have to be given on the job or immediately before hand. Education takes time, and job requirements can change in no time at all."

Hutchins envisions an educational system geared not to "a limited, partial life," but "to prepare for a full life for all."

"A six-year elementary school, a three-year high school, and a three-year college should suffice to give everybody a basic, liberal education. Only those students interested in and qualified for independent study should go on to the university."

A technological revolution in education, Hutchins said, "may go so far as to dissolve the institutions we have known. Imagine a learning center in every home. Its components might be a telephone, a TV set, and a console. Teachers might go from house to house like visiting nurses. The bulk of the instruction and examinations would be handled by computers. The safest course will be to turn over to the machines the task of training and informing, thus relieving teachers for the work of education."

The university, in Hutchins' view, must become a center of independent thought and criticism, geared to the intellect, abandoning irrelevant activities, such as intercollegiate athletics.

A foretaste of the potential contributions of science to 21st century man's physical well-being came from John R. Platt of the University of Michigan's Mental Health Research Institute.

Wouldn't it be possible, he wondered, to regenerate a cut-off finger or hand, instead of just regenerating a bit of skin tissue over the stump?

"Lobsters can regenerate claws. Perhaps the ability to do this is simply turned off in his organisms. Who knows? Perhaps it was an evolutionary defense against the unwanted proliferation of cells that we call cancer. But perhaps it might be turned on again by some application of embryonic fluids or tissue inducers."

Pervading the thoughts of most of the planners is the fundamental question whether space-age technology will end up being man's master or his servant. David T. Bazelon, writer and social critic, taking the pessimistic viewpoint, contended: "Technology does not change society; it destroys it."

But August Heckscher, public official and author, sees possible salvation in the hippies of today.

"It is easy," Heckscher told his fellow planners, "to dismiss the hippies as one more fad, a new and passing phase in the dialogue between generations which has always existed."